

BOOK REVIEW
Jamming – The Art and Discipline of Business Creativity
by John Kao
reviewed by Joseph C. Piff

John Kao is a jazz pianist, among his many professions. *Jamming* uses the idea of a “jam session” as a metaphor throughout to explain the process of human creativity and the methods that can be used to stimulate and manage that creativity. He defines “**jam** ... to take a theme, a question, a notion, a whim, an idea, pass it around, break it up, put it together, turn it over, run it backward, fly with it as far as possible, out of sight, never retreating ... but, yes, here it comes, homing in, changed, new, the essence, like nothing ever before.”

In ten chapters, Mr. Kao builds the case for the need for creativity to impregnate every organization that wants to exist for the long term, how to determine the extent of creativity that exists in an organization, and how to institutionalize that creativity in that organization. The irony, of course, is that an organization that completely redefines itself every, say, five years is not the same organization that started the process five years ago. But that is the point – today’s consumer of goods and services is constantly looking for something new. If we add to that the concept of a transforming military, using the definition from the April 2003 Transformation Planning Guidance: “a process that shapes the changing nature of military competition and cooperation through new combinations of concepts, capabilities, people and organizations that exploit our nation’s advantages and protect against our asymmetric vulnerabilities to sustain our strategic position, which helps underpin peace and stability in the world,” we see that creativity must become an prime focus for military personnel.

Notice that creativity is defined as a process. In fact, Mr. Kao states, “I define creativity as the entire process by which ideas are generated, developed, and transformed into value.” Since it is a process, it can be planned and managed. Moreover, “When we add information technology to the mix of creativity and knowledge, we get a particularly potent combination: capabilities to represent, deploy, and track knowledge coupled with technologies to promote collaboration across divergent disciplines and perspectives. When properly managed, the combination results in creative combustion.” The ambiguity, complexity and improvisation required of creative organizations requires managers to create specially tailored managerial techniques.

Mr. Kao also makes the point that the managers job is to form an organization that combines rules of operation of the whole with the no rules environment required to permit improvisation and free association. “Expectations, standards, and style have to change if you’re going to create a culture that truly values creativity,” he says.

There is a LARGE amount of managerial knowledge imparted in this book. This book will improve your ability to serve your command as Science Advisor. To change the culture of an organization, the highest levels of management must strongly endorse the concept and monitor its progress. Again from the Transformation Planning Guidance of April 2003: “The Department [of Defense] will pursue transformation more comprehensively with aggressive and wide-ranging science and technology efforts and, more importantly, with a robust concept development and experimentation program.” Do you understand the creativity process? Are you ready to lead this process? If not, read *Jamming*.